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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 001395

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SUBJECT: POLISH FM A LOCAL FAVORITE IN NATO RACE

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Classified By: Ambassador Victor Ashe for Reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (SBU) Polish media place Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski on a short list of international favorites to succeed de Hoop Scheffer as NATO Secretary General. Besides Sikorski's individual merits, analysts here believe the Polish option stands out because other powers have had a recent turn at the helm (United Kingdom), are not militarily integrated (France), or are otherwise occupied (Germany, in pre-campaign mode). More importantly, the largest country in Central Europe believes that 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is time for a NATO chief from among NATO's eastern-most members.

CHEERLEADER FOR NATO'S INVIGORATION

¶2. (C) Sikorski does not speak French (considered a prerequisite by some), but he speaks NATO. As a sitting foreign minister and former defense minister, his defense expertise is such that he, and not Defense Minister Klich, was tasked by Prime Minister Tusk to oversee an ongoing Polish defense review. He is outspoken about the need to reinvigorate NATO's war-fighting capabilities through better contingency planning and more exercises; he calls for an end to "politically correct" intelligence assessments that downplay Russian assertiveness. Sikorski has told U.S. officials that there is too much NATO infrastructure in Germany, where there is no threat, and almost nothing in the East. For Sikorski, Poland's participation in NATO's flagship operation, ISAF, fulfills NATO's expeditionary requirements while augmenting military skills needed for homeland defense.

BALANCED AND INFLUENTIAL RUSSIA-WATCHER

¶3. (C) As a Pole, Sikorski has an ingrained fear of Russian power, but he is also the architect of improved Polish-Russian relations during the Tusk Government's first year in office. The "Sikorski Doctrine," unveiled during a recent Atlantic Council speech in Washington, calls for resisting Russian attempts to change Europe's borders by force, but also notes that Poland is "the last country on earth that wants a return of the age of East-West confrontation." Sikorski successfully hosted a September visit to Warsaw by Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, combining frank private discussions on Georgia with respectful public atmospherics. Next week his deputy will meet with Russian counterparts to discuss Missile Defense confidence-building measures.

¶4. (C) Sikorski's balanced approach has brought Poland renewed credibility within EU debates on Russia. Picking his

spots, Sikorski has pushed for strong positions vis-a-vis the Russians on vital issues where he had a chance to influence the outcome: in August, for example, he dragged EU foreign ministers back from their vacations to hold a ministerial on Georgia. On the other hand, his qualified acceptance of resumed EU-Russian talks on a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement helped keep the Polish-Swedish Eastern Partnership initiative on EU's fast track.

15. (C) The U.S. sometimes seeks to stiffen European resolve to face Russian challenges; Sikorski would help. If anything, Sikorski might go overboard -- he privately challenged the United States to do more to aid Georgia, suggesting that U.S. credibility was at stake, and then publicly chided us for our perceived shortcomings. He was/is equally critical of Georgian President Saakashvili, who Sikorski believes provoked Russia unnecessarily. On the whole, though, Sikorski's passionate engagement counterbalances Western European inertia, even if he is prone to sudden policy shifts, such as his successful November push to suspend the EU visa ban on most Belarusian leaders. In that instance, Sikorski made the risky calculation that efforts to woo Minsk away from Moscow's embrace trumped Europe's interest in Belarusian democratization.

#### WESTERN EUROPE EYES THE PASSIONATE POLE

16. (C) As Secretary General, the Polish patriot with an American wife would no doubt sometimes bend over backward to show he can bargain hard with the Americans, as he did during U.S.-Polish Missile Defense talks. However, we can count on a proven American friend with a long-held commitment to NATO expeditionary missions and our collective defense. The U.S. should look favorably on Sikorski's candidacy, if -- and it is a big "if" -- Western Europeans are not set on blocking

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him. For them, even a reasonable Polish diplomat may be deemed incapable of pursuing a balanced policy toward Moscow.  
ASHE